

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 MCT-01 HA-05

AID-05 CCO-00 FBOE-00 OC-06 OPR-02 USSS-00 CA-01

A-01 SCS-06 OMB-01 SY-05 IO-13 NSCE-00 SSO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6855

INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE 342

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM

CINCUSNAVEUR, LONDON ENG

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER

COMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

DIA WASHDC

CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER

USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0919

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS MILI LE SY

SUBJ: LEBANESE SITUATION REPORT, FEBRUARY 19, 1300 HOURS LOCAL

REF: BEIRUT 0917 (DTG 181120Z FEB 78)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEW MAJOR SECURITY INCIDENTS. ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT LE-JOUR, THE INTERNAL SECURITY
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FORCES ON FEBRUARY 17 ARRESTED THREE SUSPECTS IN THE FURN ASH-SHUBBAK KILLINGS. THE BEIRUT AREA IS CALM, BUT THE MAIN DAMASCUS ROAD IN FRONT OF FAYYADIYAH BARRACKS REMAINS CLOSED. THE GOL IMPOSED "SELECTIVE" SELF-CENSORSHIP ON FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. LOCAL POLITICIAN KAMAL SHATILA, WHO HAS CLOSE TIES WITH DAMASCUS, SAID THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD NOT "LOSE THEIR HEADS" IN LEBANON. DANY CHAMOUN LEFT FOR TALKS IN DAMASCUS. END SUMMARY.

2. SECURITY SITUATION.

A. THERE WAS SMALL ARMS FIRING, FIRE WORKS AND EXPLOSIONS IN WEST BEIRUT THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 18-19 IN CELEBRATION OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEW MAJOR SECURITY INCIDENTS.

B. L'ORIENT LE-JOUR REPORTED ON FEBRUARY 18 THAT SYRIANS BEGAN TO REDEPLOY THEIR FORCES IN LEBANON WHEN SYRIAN DEFENSE MINISTER TLASS VISITED SHTAWRA ON FEBRUARY 14. AS PART OF THE REDEPLOYMENT, THE PAPER SAID, ARMORED AND INFANTRY FORCES HAD TAKEN UP POSITIONS ON TWO HILLS OVERLOOKING AD DUBAYYAH, AND SYRIAN REINFORCEMENTS HAD BEEN BROUGHT INTO JUNIYAH, HAZMIYAH, DUHUR ASH SHUWAYR AND KURTADA.

3. FURN ASH-SHUBBAT ARRESTS.

ACCORDING TO FRENCH DAILY L'ORIENT LE-JOUR, THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES ON FEBRUARY 17 ARRESTED "THREE YOUNG MEN" SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE FURN ASH-SHUBBAK KILLINGS ON FEBRUARY 15. THE PAPER NAMED THE MEN AS JOSEPH MAGHAZI, MAROUN MAGHAZI, AND GEORGES GHAFARI (ALL THREE, NOT SURPRISINGLY, HAVE CHRISTIAN NAMES). IF THREE SUSPECTS HAVE INDEED BEEN ARRESTED, A MAJOR STEP WILL HAVE BEEN TAKEN TOWARD DEFUSING THE CURRENT SITUATION.

4. GENERAL SITUATION.

DURING MORNING TOUR OF BEIRUT AREA ON FEBRUARY 19, EMBOFF OBSERVED THAT TRAFFIC IN ASHRAFIYAH AND FURN ASH-SHUBBAK WAS NORMAL
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FOR A SUNDAY MORNING. (BOTH PHALANGE AND NLP FLAGS WERE FLYING PROMINENTLY ON FURN ASH-SHUBBAK'S MAIN STREET.) THE SECTION OF THE MAIN DAMASCUS ROAD IN FRONT OF THE FAYYADIYAH BARRACKS WAS STILL CLOSED. THE SYRIANS WERE CONTINUING TO ALLOW TRAFFIC TO DETOUR AROUND THE BARRACKS THROUGH HADATH. IN WEST BEIRUT, SYRIAN CHECKPOINTS REMAINED CONSIDERABLY BELOW NORMAL, BUT ARMED MILITIA CHECKPOINTS HAVE NOT REAPPEARED ON THE STREETS SINCE THEIR BRIEF APPEARANCE ON FEBRUARY 14.

5. PRESS CENSORSHIP.

A. THE GOL IMPOSED "SELECTIVE" CENSORSHIP ON FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN LEBANON AS OF FEBRUARY 18. THIS MOVE WAS TRIGGERED BY A REUTERS REPORT ON FEBRUARY 16, WHICH CITED A SPOKESMAN OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY AS SAYING THE SYRIANS WERE MASSING FORCES FOR AN OFFENSIVE ON EAST BEIRUT. PARTY LEADER CAMILLE CHAMOUN LATER DENIED THE STORY.

B. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SECURITY TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE CENSORSHIP FOR THE MOMENT APPLIED ONLY TO NEWS "WHICH MIGHT PREJUDICE THE PUBLIC ORDER AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LEBANON." FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS THEMSELVES HAVE TO DECIDE WHICH STORIES TO SUBMIT FOR REVIEW BY CENSORSHIP AUTHORITIES. CORRESPONDENTS HAVE TO CLEAR THEIR STORIES BY TELEPHONE ONLY UNDER THE NEW

REGULATIONS, ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT LE-JOUR.

6. REMARKS OF SHATILA AND SABBAGH.

A. IN A CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF ON FEBRUARY 17, PRO-SYRIAN NASSERIST KAMAL SHATILA SAID THAT HE HAD JUST MET IN DAMASCUS WITH ABDULLAH AL-AHMAR, THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SYRIAN BAATH PARTY. AL AHMAR HAD SAID THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD NOT "LOSE THEIR HEADS" IN LEBANON AND WOULD CONTINUE TO TRY TO AVOID CHOOSING SIDES AMONG THE VARIOUS LEBANESE PARTIES. SHATILA, WHO IS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNION OF POPULAR LABOR FORCES, HAS VERY CLOSE TIES WITH THE SYRIANS. HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY DEADLINE SET BY DAMASCUS FOR THE APPREHENSION OF THE PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FURN ASH-SHUBBAK KILLINGS, AND HE REMARKED THAT THE PRECISE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INCIDENT WERE STILL NOT KNOWN. THE
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SYRIANS WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, ALLOW THEMSELVES "TO BE BLED INDEFINITELY."

B. AL MURABITUN OFFICIAL SAMIR SABBAGH, AN ANTI-SYRIAN NASSERIST, TOLD EMBOFF ON FEBRUARY 18 THAT HE DID NOT THINK THE SECURITY SITUATION IN WEST BEIRUT WOULD DETERIORATE. HE SAID AL MURABITUN HAD ORDERED ITS MEN TO STAY OFF THE STREETS WITH WEAPONS; THE ONLY ARMED MILITIA TO MAN A CHECKPOINT ON FEBRUARY 14 WERE FROM THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION (ASU), AN INSIGNIFICANT GROUP. AL MURABITUN, AT THE REQUEST OF THE SYRIANS, HAD CHASED THE ASU FIGHTERS FROM THE ROADBLOCKS IN BAD-ID-DRISS. IN SABBAGH'S VIEW, BOTH THE LEBANESE FRONT AND THE SYRIANS HAD STRONG COMMON INTERESTS, INCLUDING HOSTILITY TO THE PALESTINIANS, WHICH WOULD PREVENT THEM FROM LETTING THE CURRENT SITUATION GET OUT OF HAND.

7. DANY IN DAMASCUS.

DANY CHAMOUN, THE MILITARY COMMANDER OF THE NLP, LEFT FOR DAMASCUS THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 18, FOR TALKS WITH SYRIAN LEADERS. IKE QUOTED "INFORMED SOURCES" AS SAYING CAMILLE CHAMOUN HAD SENT HIS SON TO THE SYRIAN CAPITAL TO CONFIRM THE READINESS OF THE PARTY AND THE LEBANESE FRONT TO COOPERATE WITH THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES.

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